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KEVIN SAVETZ 18 November 2002

V.92 Picks Up Speed

Back in TidBITS-580, I wrote an article about V.92, then a new analog modem standard that was just starting to appear on store shelves. A year and a half later, V.92 isn't exactly a household word, but it can make your Internet connection faster and more pleasant.

<https://tidbits.com/getbits.acgi?tbart=06431>

If you use an analog modem to get on the Internet, you need all the speed you can get. Almost 80 percent of U.S. Internet users still use 56K modems that download 50 kilobits per second (Kbps) on a good day. V.92 offers the hope of accelerating that slow lane of the Internet, but Internet service providers and computer manufacturers have been slow to adopt it.

V.92 offers four major new features: "Modem on-hold" lets you take an incoming call when you're online, then return to the Internet connection; "quick connect," which should cut in half the time a modem takes to establish a connection; better compression for faster downloads of text files and the HTML portions of Web pages; and upload speeds of 48 Kbps, up from 33.6 Kbps in older (V.90) modems.

<http://www.v92.com/>

But none of those features works unless your Internet service provider upgrades its hardware. Until very recently, only local and regional ISPs have made a point of supporting – and promoting – V.92. United Online, the parent company of NetZero and Juno, is the first national ISP to offer V.92 access nationwide officially.

<http://www.irconnect.com/untd/pages/news_releases.shtml?d=31885>

<http://www.netzero.com/>

<http://www.juno.com/>

America Online, EarthLink, MSN, and AT&T WorldNet have yet to announce V.92 support, but many users have discovered unadvertised V.92 access numbers, as those services' backbone providers upgrade hardware. America Online has quietly begun to note which of its access numbers provide V.92 access. The Web site Modemsite.com lists other Internet service providers that support V.92.

<http://access.web.aol.com/>

<http://www.modemsite.com/56k/v92isp.asp>

Mac Support for V.92 — If you purchased a Mac recently, you may have a V.92 modem and not know it. Many manufacturers include V.92 modems, but their Web sites don't always make that clear. Apple reportedly provides V.92 modems in all currently shipping hardware, although the iMac's technical specification page claims it has a V.90 modem.

For users who have tried it, the favorite feature is usually modem on-hold. Everyone wants more speed, but modem on-hold can save you money: if you currently have a second phone line just for your modem, you can drop back to a single line with call waiting. Mac OS X 10.2 Jaguar is the first version of Mac OS to support modem on-hold – when you have an incoming phone call, a window appears to alert you. If you take the call, you can talk from 30 seconds to 16 minutes, depending on how long your ISP lets you put it on hold.

The other features – quick-connect and faster transfer speeds – are invisible to the operating system, so will work with any version of Mac OS, as long as your ISP supports those features.

I recently compared two external V.92 modems, both under $100, to a V.90 modem. The two new modems negotiated faster connection speeds, and V.92 seems more tolerant of phone-line eccentricities. Large, text-heavy Web pages typically appeared a few seconds sooner using the V.92 modems, but there was little difference on graphics-heavy pages.

Anyone with a V.92 modem should check its manufacturer's Web site for firmware updates, since most companies are still fine-tuning their implementations of this protocol.

[Kevin Savetz has been a freelance computer/technology journalist for a decade.]

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